

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 248658

64

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TOSEC 352

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, U.S., SY, UR

SUBJECT: SOVIET VIEWS ON SYRIA

GENEVA FOR SECRETARY'S PARTY

1. ANATOLY KOROLEV, ATTACHE AT SOVIET EMBASSY WASHINGTON, WHO FOLLOWS MIDDLE EASTERN AFFAIRS, ASKED TO SEE NEA/ARN OFFICER TO DISCUSS SYRIAN AFFAIRS. KOROLEV MADE FOLLOWING MAIN POINTS:

SECRET

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PAGE 02 STATE 248658

2. SOVIETS STRONGLY URGED SYRIANS TO ATTEND GENEVA PEACE

CONFERENCE. SYRIAN DECISION NOT TO ATTEND CONFERENCE BASED ON SEVERAL FACTORS: SYRIAN PRESIDENT HAFIZ-AL-ASAD IS UNDER STRONG INTERNAL POLITICAL PRESSURES TO TAKE HARD LINE ON NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAELIS. NOT ONLY IS HE UNDER LEFT WING BA'ATH PARTY POLITICAL PRESSURES, BUT ALSO UNDER PRESSURES BY PALESTINIAN GROUPS TO ASSURE THAT THERE IS NO "SELL OUT" AT THE NEGOTIATIONS. SYRIA'S POLITICAL POWER STRUCTURE IS SUCH THAT THERE ARE FREQUENT CONTRADICTIONS IN ITS POLICY FORMULATION. ASAD'S REGIME WHILE "NOT SHAKEY, IS NOT RPT NOT A STRONG ONE." THEREFORE, SYRIAN REGIME IS QUITE SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE PRESSURES PRESENTLY BEING EXERTED UPON IT.

3. SYRIANS PROBABLY WANT TO WAIT AND SEE IF GENEVA CONFERENCE GETS OFF THE GROUND AND IF PROGRESS IS MADE

BETWEEN THE PARTIES. SYRIA THEN CAN PLAY OUT ITS OPTION TO JOIN IN AT A LATER DATE. IT ONLY MAKES SENSE THAT SYRIA JOIN NEGOTIATION PROCESS AT SOME STAGE SINCE SYRIA CAN ONLY HOPE TO GET BACK OCCUPIED TERRITORIES BY NEGOTIATIONS AND NOT BY WARFARE.

4. KOROLEV STATED EXPLICITLY THAT SOVIETS HAVE COUNSELED RESTRAINT ON SYRIAN LEADERSHIP NOT RPT NOT TO RESUME MILITARY HOSTILITIES. ALTHOUGH IT DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE WHAT SYRIANS WOULD HAVE TO GAIN BY GOING TO WAR, SOVIETS ARE CONCERNED THAT CLASHES ON CEASEFIRE LINE CAN ESCALATE AND TRIGGER A RESUMPTION OF HOSTILITIES. ALSO, THERE IS THREAT OF THE ACT OF "A MADMAN, FOR EXAMPLE IN THE SYRIAN AIR FORCE" TAKING THE INITIATIVE TO LAUNCH AN ATTACK AGAINST ISRAELIS. RESUMPTION OF FIGHTING ON SYRIAN FRONT ALSO COULD FORCE PRESIDENT SADAT'S HAND AND RESULT IN A BREAKDOWN IN CEASEFIRE ON EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI FRONT.

5. KOROLEV SAID IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF ISRAEL COULD SHOW SOME FLEXIBILITY VIS-A-VIS THE SYRIANS IN ORDER TO ENCOURAGE LATTER TO ENGAGE IN TALKS. DEPTOFF REFERRED TO GOLDA MEIR'S PUBLIC STATEMENT OF NOVEMBER 26 IN WHICH SHE STATED ISRAEL WOULD BE WILLING TO HAND OVER TWO OBSERVATION POSTS ON MOUNT HERMON TO UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 STATE 248658

FORCES AND ALLOW THE RETURN OF 15,000 VILLAGERS TO THE GOLAN HEIGHTS AREA IF SYRIA AGREED TO RETURN ISRAELI POWS. DEPTOFF SAID THIS REPRESENTED SOME FLEXIBILITY OF ISRAELI POSITION IN CONTRAST TO EARLIER STATEMENTS BY ISRAELI OFFICIALS ON POW ISSUE. POSSIBILITY OF FLEXIBILITY EXISTS ON BOTH SIDES; HOWEVER, DEPTOFF COMMENTED, IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO WORK ANYTHING OUT WHEN THE PARTIES ARE NOT ENGAGED IN SOME SORT OF TALKS TO FORMULATE SPECIFIC

POSITIONS.

6. KOROLEV STATED IT UNFORTUNATE SYRIANS HAVE DECIDED NOT TO GO TO GENEVA AT THIS TIME. TALKS HAVE TO START SOMEWHERE BETWEEN SYRIANS AND ISRAELIS AND SYRIANS COULD HAVE HAD OPTION TO DISCUSS DISENGAGEMENT AND POWS AT OPENING PHASE OF CONFERENCE. HE SUGGESTED THAT PERHAPS USG COULD SUGGEST TO KING HASSAN OF MOROCCO THAT HASSAN USE HIS INFLUENCE WITH SYRIANS TO MODIFY THEIR POSITION AND GO TO GENEVA.

7. CONCERNING PALESTINIAN TERRORIST ATTACK AT ROME AIRPORT KOROLEV SAID TERRORISTS SHOULD BE SEVERELY PUNISHED. RUSH

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